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GOVERNMENT RESPONDS TO COMMITTEE'S FUR REPORT

OTTAWA (April 15, 1987) -- The Honourable Bill McKnight, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, today tabled in the House of Commons the Federal Government's response to the report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development - The Fur Issue: Cultural Continuity, Economic Opportunity.

The Federal Government's role in the fur issue involves responsibilities of three Ministers: The Honourable Bill McKnight, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, Secretary of State for External Affairs, and the Honourable Tom McMillan, Minister of Environment.

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The government's response concerns all of the 36 recommendations made by the Standing Committee on the importance of trapping to Canada's native people and northerners and focused on the effects on the trapping industry from the animal rights movement.

The report was based on the results of 18 hearings held in Ottawa and a number held in the Northwest Territories and Yukon.

Submissions were received from governments, trapping organizations, aboriginal groups, as well as animal welfare organizations and animal rights groups.

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Information

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA RESPONSE

TO

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE ON

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT -

THE FUR ISSUE: CULTURAL CONTINUITY, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

April 15, 1987

GUIDE TO NUMBERED RESPONSES

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3.	Flexibility in Social Assistance Programs to Support Aboriginal Trapping
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7.	Native Involvement in Development of Trapping Methods
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9.	Evaluation of Humane Death in Trapping
10.	National Standards for Trapping and Trapper Education
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12.	Business and Tax Management Element for Aboriginal Trapper Courses
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30. Government Promotion of World Conservation Strategy (CWS)
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DETAILED RESPONSES TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT
ON THE FUR ISSUE

1. Recommendation:

The Government of Canada issue a statement which officially recognizes the importance of the trapping industry to Canada and especially to aboriginal and northern peoples. The statement would commit the government to the preservation of the trapping industry and to working towards greater economic benefits for aboriginal and northern trappers and towards more humane standards of trapping and wildlife management.

Response:

The Government recognizes that trapping is an activity which is culturally and economically central to the way of life of many Canadians, particularly aboriginals and those living in northern areas. The Government is committed to preserving indigenous culture and to improving economic opportunities for indigenous and northern people.

While the Government agrees on the need to protect trapping as an economic and cultural pursuit, its recent experience with the anti-sealing campaign has shown that there are limits to its effectiveness in such activities. Based on this experience, the Government recognizes that the aboriginal people of Canada and other fur industry representatives are often their own best advocates in acting to protect their resource-based economy. Accordingly, the Government will encourage and coordinate these interest groups in promoting a greater public understanding of trapping as an effective wildlife management practice and essential economic pursuit.

The development of more humane standards of trapping fur-bearing animals is in keeping with sound conservation principles and serves the interests and needs of those involved in the fur industry and general public. The Government of Canada will continue its leadership and coordinating role in this area.

2. Recommendation:

The federal government and particularly the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development assert and support the fundamental right of the aboriginal people of Canada to pursue hunting and trapping.

Response:

The Government has consistently supported the right of Canada's aboriginal peoples to pursue hunting and trapping.

In response to the anti-fur challenge, DIAND was allocated \$1.6 million for the period 1984-88, to consult with aboriginal organizations and to undertake information and education programs for aboriginal and northern trappers. DIAND facilitated the formation of two aboriginal organizations - Indigenous Survival International (Canada) (ISI) and the Aboriginal Trappers Federation of Canada (ATFC). In addition, \$60,000 has been provided to ISI for the development of an economic strategy to increase participation of aboriginal people in the fur industry.

Efforts to define the fundamental rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are also being undertaken through the land claims negotiations and the constitutional process. In both specific and comprehensive claims, DIAND supports aboriginal groups' involvement

in management and control of natural resources, establishment of wildlife advisory boards, and confirmation of hunting, fishing and trapping rights in their traditional areas.

3. Recommendation:

Social assistance programs become more flexible in order to provide start-up funding for aboriginal people who wish to adopt or return to living off the land but lack the financial means to do so.

Response:

In 1972 the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development obtained Treasury Board authority to use social assistance funds to generate employment for persons in, or about to be in, need of social assistance. The employment projects were to be located on reserves and under band government auspices and were to enhance the employability of participants and to produce goods and services for the betterment of the community. This program is still being used effectively in native communities.

During the spring and summer of 1985, the Regional Economic and Employment Development Program (REED), within DIAND, received approval to use social assistance in support of employment initiatives and training. In consultation with REED, the "Social Development Program" developed a formal approval mechanism for project proposals. These funding initiatives are coordinated through the Indian Community Human Resource Strategy Program.

In many regions, across Canada and the Territories, REED allocates funds for initial transportation and start up costs at the beginning of the fur trapping season, either through a special grant or a loan.

4. Recommendation:

Where aboriginal people wish to participate, the federal government provide funding for secondary fur industry activities such as tanning, manufacturing and retailing of articles from hides and furs.

Response:

The federal government has provided funding for secondary fur industries for activities such as tanning, manufacturing and the retailing of articles made from hides and furs, as well as the promotion of aboriginal cottage industries through the economic development program. Each project is assessed on its own merits and usually funded if it has the potential to become commercially viable and self-sustaining.

The Department of Regional Industrial Expansion (DRIE) is responsible for the management of a number of economic and regional development programs. Programs such as the Native Economic Development Program (NEDP) are specifically directed to northern development and to native economic development.

A Native Economic Development Program was established in April, 1984 with a four year budget of \$345 million to assist the development of economic self-reliance among Canada's aboriginal people. A native controlled advisory board oversees the operation of the program. Currently, DRIE is seeking amendments to the program that will expand the range of economic activities eligible for support.

5. Recommendation:

The federal government fund aboriginal cottage industries dedicated to manufacturing fur products for everyday use.

Response:

The federal government has provided funding for the promotion of aboriginal cottage industries through NEDP on a project-by-project basis. Each project is assessed on its own merits. Programs specifically directed to northern and native economic development have been made more flexible in terms of the range and nature of activities eligible for support. Under these programs, certain activities that could be appropriately described as "cottage industry" have received assistance.

The Government through the Departments of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Regional Industrial Expansion will continue to support projects to manufacture fur products that show potential for commercial viability.

6. Recommendation:

The federal government assign a high priority to the development of alternative traps and trapping methods by continuing to fund the trap research which is currently being undertaken by the Fur Institute of Canada.

Response:

The federal government is committed to the development of more humane trapping systems. A Federal and Provincial Committee for Humane Trapping was formed in 1973 with a mandate and budget to seek realistic humane trapping systems for Canada's fur-bearing animals. This initiative has led to the construction of an extensive humane trap research facility at the Alberta Environmental Research Centre in Vegreville and the development of a program in which six scientists have been contracted to carry out research and testing on a full-time basis.

The Fur Institute of Canada and the Department of the Environment, in consultation with the Research Centre, are presently examining, modifying, testing and retesting trapping devices to meet specific criteria.

7. Recommendation:

The Fur Institute of Canada involve aboriginal people in the development of alternative traps and trapping methods, thus ensuring that regional differences, such as problems associated with trapping on the tundra, are recognized.

Response:

Several aboriginal organizations are members of the Fur Institute of Canada (FIC). The federal government recognizes the importance of involving aboriginal people in the development of more humane trapping methods and will encourage the FIC to respond positively to this recommendation.

8. Recommendation:

As new traps are developed, the federal government consider the advisability of providing incentives for a trap replacement program in order to expedite their use.

Response:

Whenever a new technological advance is introduced into an industry, there is always some reluctance on the part of that industry to adopt it. The Government recognizes that as new more humane traps are developed, there will likely be some reluctance on the part of trappers to adopt them for reasons of habit, unfamiliarity, lack of confidence in the new system, inconvenience and cost of replacement. Through trapper education courses, the Government can dispel some of this reluctance by demonstrating the efficiency and general advantages of the new systems. In addition, the Government will coordinate, in consultation with the provinces and territories, the development of a national strategy for trap replacement and/or retrofitting by industry or other jurisdictions.

9. Recommendation:

The federal government, in assisting the development of alternative traps and trapping methods, formulate and adhere to a specific definition of a humane death for trapped animals.

Response:

The evaluation of the humaneness of the capture or death of each fur-bearer species within the various trapping situations is an integral part of present research protocols. To "adhere to a specific definition for a humane death" could possibly have the effect of hampering research and indeed delay implementation of "improved" trapping systems.

10. Recommendation:

A federal-provincial-territorial committee be established to work in consultation with the Fur Institute of Canada, the purpose being to develop and implement legislation which is consistent across the country, relating to standardized trapping methods, standardized trapper education, and mandatory trap checks.

Response:

The Federal Provincial Wildlife Conference annually brings together Canada's federal, provincial and territorial wildlife ministers and officials to discuss matters affecting the management and conservation of Canada's wildlife resources. This would be an appropriate forum through which the FIC could work towards a national standardization of trapping methods and education. The FIC will be encouraged to make a positive response to this recommendation.

11. Recommendation:

The federal government recognize trapper education courses as legitimate employment training to enable funding to be made available through existing government programs.

Response:

By its very nature, trapping is a seasonal activity. However, the federal government recognizes that trapping is a legitimate occupational skill which requires many years of training if it is to be conducted professionally, humanely and as a money-making venture. The professional trapper must conserve and manage the wildlife resources upon which he depends for his livelihood or he will soon be out of business. Improved trapper education courses and greater accessibility to those courses will enhance these skills and at the same time encourage the public to understand that a well-managed trapline operated by a skilled and knowledgeable trapper is both good business and good wildlife conservation.

Some provinces and territories have implemented trapper education programs. Canada Employment and Immigration is willing to support trapper training courses where trapping is identified as a regional or local shortage occupation and where it would help long-term unemployed individuals to improve their competitiveness or learning potential in the labour market.

12. Recommendation:

Trapper education courses for aboriginal people include a business and tax management component to assist trappers with income management.

Response:

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development will include a business and tax management component as part of the curricula for its trapper training courses.

13. Recommendation:

Government departments and agencies involved in this debate consider the advisability of compiling accurate data especially concerning the number of wrong offs and non-target animals. These data should be made available to the public by qualified government personnel.

Response:

Data now available concerning so-called "wring offs" and non-target or unwanted fur-bearer captures is limited in its scientific credibility or is confined only to trapping situations involving carnivorous animals, e.g., wolves, foxes, coyotes, etc. However, accurate data is now being collected in the course of field trials connected with the various trap research and testing programs.

Much of the problem that exists in this area is due to the use of the conventional leghold trap deployed in "open" land sets. Current humane trap research is aimed at finding alternatives to this trapping situation and therefore reducing this problem.

The Government will support the conducting of each survey across Canada to the ability of available funding.

14. Recommendation:

The Federal Government ensure that Canada's aboriginal people are given a substantial role in the management of wildlife and in the conservation of Canada's renewable resources.

Response:

The Government, through the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has transferred wildlife management and conservation to the individual Band Councils on their respective reserve lands as a matter of policy. In addition, the Department has made significant amendments to the comprehensive land claims policy whereby claims settlements will recognize aboriginal interests in relation to environmental matters, including water, land use and wildlife management. Under this policy aboriginal groups may negotiate membership on resource management boards and other agencies with decision-making powers.

The Department will continue to support the role of the aboriginal people of Canada in the conservation and management of wildlife resources.

15. Recommendations:

The Government of Canada recognize and fund Indigenous Survival International as the aboriginal advocate in international activities to counter the anti-harvesting threat.

Each of the three departments (DOE, DIAND, DEA) have a distinct mandate with respect to the promotion and development of the fur trade. Although each is complementary, they are to some degree dependent upon the success of the other two departmental programs. Accordingly, the new ICF will meet on a monthly basis to review new program proposals from aboriginal and fur industry groups and to ensure a continuity and compatibility in governmental efforts relating to the anti-fur controversy.

21. Recommendation:

The Government of Canada provide an adequate budget to this Committee to perform its duties.

Response:

The new Interdepartmental Committee on Fur (ICF) will carry out its coordinating functions within the existing budgets of the three member departments.

22. Recommendation:

The Departments of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Environment and External Affairs allocate sufficient personnel to the Interdepartmental Committee to fulfill its mandate.

Response:

The new Interdepartmental Committee on Fur will carry out its functions within the staff allocations of the three departments.

Most recently, the Department of External Affairs has assigned a senior official to the position of Senior Advisor International Fur Issue, to coordinate that Department's efforts in promoting the fur industry.

23. Recommendation:

The Government of Canada designate the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development as the lead agency in federal government activities in support of the fur industry.

Response:

Recognizing the cultural, spiritual and economic importance which trapping and the harvesting of wild animals holds for Canada's native peoples, it is appropriate that the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development act as the domestic lead agency in coordinating the campaign to counter the anti-fur threat. It is also recognized that the fur controversy affects more than just aboriginal interests. In the international arena the broader interests of the fur trade as a national industry will best be served by the Department of External Affairs acting as the coordinating agency.

24. Recommendation:

The Interdepartmental Committee on the Fur Issue report within six months to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and, through the Minister, to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development on its membership, progress and future directions, and thereafter annually or at the call of the Chair.

Response:

The new Interdepartmental Committee on the Fur Issue will endeavour to report on its membership, progress and future directions by the end of October, 1987, and thereafter as appropriate.

25. Recommendation:

The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development establish a body to advise the Interdepartmental Committee consisting of representatives from Indigenous Survival International, Aboriginal Trappers Federation of Canada, the Fur Institute and other national umbrella fur industry representatives.

Response:

Each of the national organizations mentioned in the recommendation represents several smaller or regional groups and in some cases there are overlapping memberships - for example, Aboriginal Trappers Federation of Canada is a member of the Fur Institute of Canada. It would be appropriate to reduce duplication, and certainly facilitate the evaluation of project requests received by the three departments responsible for the defense of the fur industry, if those proposals were coordinated through an informal or formal steering committee representing industry interests. The key organizations will be encouraged to develop such an approach.

26. Recommendation:

The Interdepartmental Committee on the Fur Issue work with the fur industry in collecting data on the various facets of the industry including numbers of trappers, aboriginal participation and economic reliance on trapping.

Response:

The Fur Institute of Canada has agreed to carry out appropriate surveys and studies to improve the data relating to the numbers of trappers and the economics of trapping. The Government will assist the FIC in these studies.

27. Recommendation:

The Interdepartmental Committee on the Fur Issue increase the federal government's public education function in regard to the aboriginal fur issue and place more emphasis on dissemination of accurate documentation.

Response:

Based on the Government's experiences as a public educator during the unsuccessful defense of the Canadian sealing industry, a public education campaign on the similarly emotional issue of trapping would best be carried out by those who would be most directly affected by a collapse in the fur industry. There have been successes with this approach and the Government will continue to facilitate and support representative groups from the industry in their public education campaigns.

28. Recommendation:

The Humane Trap and Development Committee of the Fur Institute of Canada clearly define its terms of reference.

Response:

In 1983 the Fur Institute of Canada (FIC) was formed and its first order of business was to establish its Humane Trap Research and Development Committee. That Committee's terms of reference were defined and approved by the FIC Board of Directors in March, 1984.

The FIC is a federally chartered non-profit corporation, administered by an elected Board of Directors and is therefore solely responsible for its Committees and their terms of references. A funding agreement between the Department of the Environment and the FIC provides direct grants to that agency to carry out humane trapping research.

The Humane Trap Research and Development Committee of the Fur Institute develops and recommends research priorities to the FIC Board of Directors and reports on progress being made. The Committee has recently developed a five year program with an objective to identify at least one humane trapping system for each of the fur-bearer species trapped in Canada within that time.

29. Recommendation:

The Canadian Wildlife Service continue to support trap research activities of the Fur Institute of Canada being conducted at the Alberta Environmental Centre in Vegreville, Alberta.

Response:

The Government is committed to the development of humane traps for the capture of wild fur-bearing animals. The Canadian Wildlife Service recognizes the valuable humane trap research being carried out at the research facility now in operation at the Alberta Environmental Centre in Vegreville and will continue to support it to the ability of available funding.

30. Recommendation:

The Department of the Environment play an active role in promoting the World Conservation Strategy.

Response:

The Department of the Environment is a participant on the Task Force on Environment and the Economy established by the Canadian Council of Resource and Environment Ministers (CCREM) to identify measures and actions necessary to promote the principles in the World Conservation Strategy. This will be an ongoing activity as will be the annual Federal-Provincial Wildlife Conference.

31. Recommendation:

The Department of the Environment support the inclusion of indigenous renewable resource activities in the World Conservation Strategy.

Response:

The Department of the Environment supports the inclusion of a new folio supporting the concept of indigenous renewable resource activities in the World Conservation Strategy.

32. Recommendation:

The Department of the Environment take a higher profile in educating the public on conservation principles, and given public endorsements for the application of such principles to harvesting Canada's fur-bearing animals in accordance with sustainable use.

Response:

Numerous publications, films and slides are available to the public and media covering a vast array of wildlife conservation topics.

1987 will celebrate the centennial of wildlife conservation in Canada with many public activities. A major exhibit illustrating wildlife management in Canada will be supported by the Department of the Environment at the Conference of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) to be held in Ottawa in July, 1987. This display will later tour various exhibitions across Canada.

Communication materials specifically relating to the trapping of fur-bearing animals were produced and have been provided to the Fur Institute of Canada for circulation. These materials include a 27 minute film and short videos which portray trapping in Canada and the work being done in the area of trap research and trapper education. Also a series of fact sheets has been prepared and has had wide circulation in Canada, the United States of America, Europe and the United Kingdom.

33. Recommendation:

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development designate personnel and financial resources in order to carry out its mandate to take lead responsibility for the federal government's domestic pro-fur activities.

Response:

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development recognizes the importance of fur harvesting activities to aboriginal and northern Canadians and actively supports the promotion of pro-fur activities. DIAND has committed personnel and resources to these efforts and will continue to do so within the ability of available funding.

34. Recommendation:

The Department of External Affairs undergo an attitudinal change in favour of recognizing the legitimacy of trapping as an economic activity, and actively promote the fur industry in overseas posts.

Response:

The Government of Canada recognizes the legitimacy of trapping as an economic activity and supports the taking of animals for fur, based on humane and responsible trapping practices.

The Department of External Affairs has been highly supportive of the Canadian fur industry through trade development activities; diplomatic activity to influence other governments' policies and consistent encouragement to the various sectors of the industry to develop and implement a coordinated international communications program in defense of the fur trade. External has worked closely with various bodies in organizing and sponsoring trade missions, assisting with trade shows, finding potential trading partners in numerous countries, and counselling the industry on ways to improve their export performance. On the diplomatic front, foreign posts monitor the situation in their respective territories on a continuing basis, ensure that they have the appropriate contacts and are thus ready to use traditional diplomatic means to influence foreign government attitudes. With respect to the international public argument, External Affairs has assisted various fur interest groups to present their views.

External Affairs shares the concern of the industry that Canada's international fur trade interests could be jeopardized by animal rights activists. The experience of the recent anti-sealing debate has demonstrated that industry representatives can be much more effective in promoting the fur industry than can government officials. Accordingly, the Department of External Affairs will not act as the international spokesperson for the fur industry. However, the Department has an important role to play in assisting the industry in its communications program.

To be effective, the Canadian fur trade requires an appropriate strategy based on a professional assessment of actual attitudes in key countries towards fur and the taking of animals. In this connection, External Affairs is contributing to the cost of attitudinal research and professional guidance in the United Kingdom and the United States. The Department will continue to fund the development and implementation of a coordinated international communications strategy in defense of the fur trade to the limit of available funding. Canadian posts abroad will assist industry representatives in the implementation of this program.

The Department of External Affairs has appointed a senior officer as the Chairman of the International Fur Issues Committee to work full-time on fur-related issues.

35. Recommendation:

In cooperation with the fur industry, the federal government provide appropriate briefings to External Affairs personnel in the home office and overseas to assist them in providing the facts about trapping to the international public.

Response:

External Affairs welcomes the recommendation that appropriate briefings be provided to its officials in order that they will be better able to assist the industry in its communications efforts. To this end industry/government briefings will be arranged for all posts in Europe and the United States.

36. Recommendation:

The Department of External Affairs make facilities and other assistance available in its overseas embassies to aboriginal and fur industry representatives to counter the threat to the fur industry posed by the animal rights campaign.

Response:

Overseas embassies provide briefings and other support to visiting fur interest representatives from Canada. The facilities (offices, telephones, etc.) that are made available to other business interests are also available to them. However, it is the responsibility of the fur interest groups to establish a permanent presence in another country if that is their desire. Embassies can only provide such facilities on a temporary basis.

Visiting fur interest representatives will continue to be given the use of embassy facilities in the same manner as other visiting businesses and External Affairs will continue to offer briefings and whatever other logistical support is appropriate.

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